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Gallery and Studio

JULES AUGUSTE HABERT-DYS.



ONE of the first duties of the critic, and perhaps his chief and only useful function, is to be a popularizer, to call the attention of the public to new merit, to put before them young talent. In doing so the critic may often force the note of praise. Where

is the harm? If the young talent in question does not fulfil all the promise given, it will be time enough to settle accounts later, when he has taken possession of his renown.

Jules Auguste Habert-Dys, the artist whom it is the pleasure of THE ART AMATEUR to present to the reader this month, has all kinds of claims to be known and encouraged; he is young, his talent is varied and personal, and he has the now very rare qualities of delicate taste and decorative sentiment. In ornamentation M. Habert-Dys has revealed a thoroughly original talent and apparently inexhaustible inventiveness. The work by which he is known to the public consists mainly of frames or "encadrements de page," frises, fleurons, culs de lampe, and ornamental letters composed during the past three years for "L'Art." The number of designs by M. Habert-Dys published by that journal in so short a period shows how highly the intelligent director esteems his talent, and at the same time it demonstrates the extreme fecundity of the designer. In the six ornamental alphabets that have already appeared, in the numberless frames and typographical accessories, no trace of fatigue or of a desire to repeat is visible. On the other hand, while occasionally seeking inspiration for a cornice, a volute, a griffin, or an arrangement of fantastic pendants or scrolls in the compositions of the master designers of the seventeenth and eighteenth

centuries, M. Habert-Dys always preserves and marks his personality in the ensemble of his design. These excursions into the portfolios of the past are, however, exceedingly rare; he is essentially a modern, and in his best work his two great sources of inspiration are nature and the quintessence of nature, which, as Charles Blanc tells us, is the characteristic and supreme quality of Japanese art. Uniting delicate taste and scrupulously careful and yet bold draughts-

manship to a thorough mastery of the decorative disposition of lines and masses, M. Habert-Dys lays under contribution the whole animal, vegetable and floral world; and living, as he does, in an age of realism, he treats his birds and flowers and bits of landscape in a realistic manner, studying each detail from nature, amassing study upon study for the composition of his simplest design. His frames for pages, in spite of the limitations imposed by the typographer, are always ingenious and full of grace. Examine, for

oughly sincere reproduction of European flower and animal life. In the other frame reproduced—for all the illustrations of this article our thanks are due to the courtesy of the proprietor of "L'Art"—will be seen a specimen of the picturesque treatment of the "encadrement," a style perhaps open to criticism from the point of view of purely decorative art, on the ground of inappropriateness to the end served, namely, to frame a space of printed matter. At any rate, in such compositions perspective effects should

be very sparingly employed. Nevertheless, in this picturesque treatment of the "encadrement" M. Habert-Dys has achieved some very happy results, and I remember with pleasure among the designs published in "L'Art," not very long ago, "encadrements" representing a groined window frame garlanded with eglantine and surmounted with a fantastic distance of feudal turrets and towers and the calm of monastic cloisters; a landscape with cows grazing in deep thick pasturage up to their udders, and in the middle distance trees towering up into the sky, which is traversed by a hurricane of rain, behind which the moon breaks out, round and silvery as one sees it in the Japanese albums; a frame of worm-eaten, dilapidated wood with convolvulus leaves and flowers trailing along, and an army of mice devouring the flowers, themselves soon to be devoured by the cat, whose furious head appears in one corner—a design that had the thoroughly French finesse of a fable of Lafontaine.

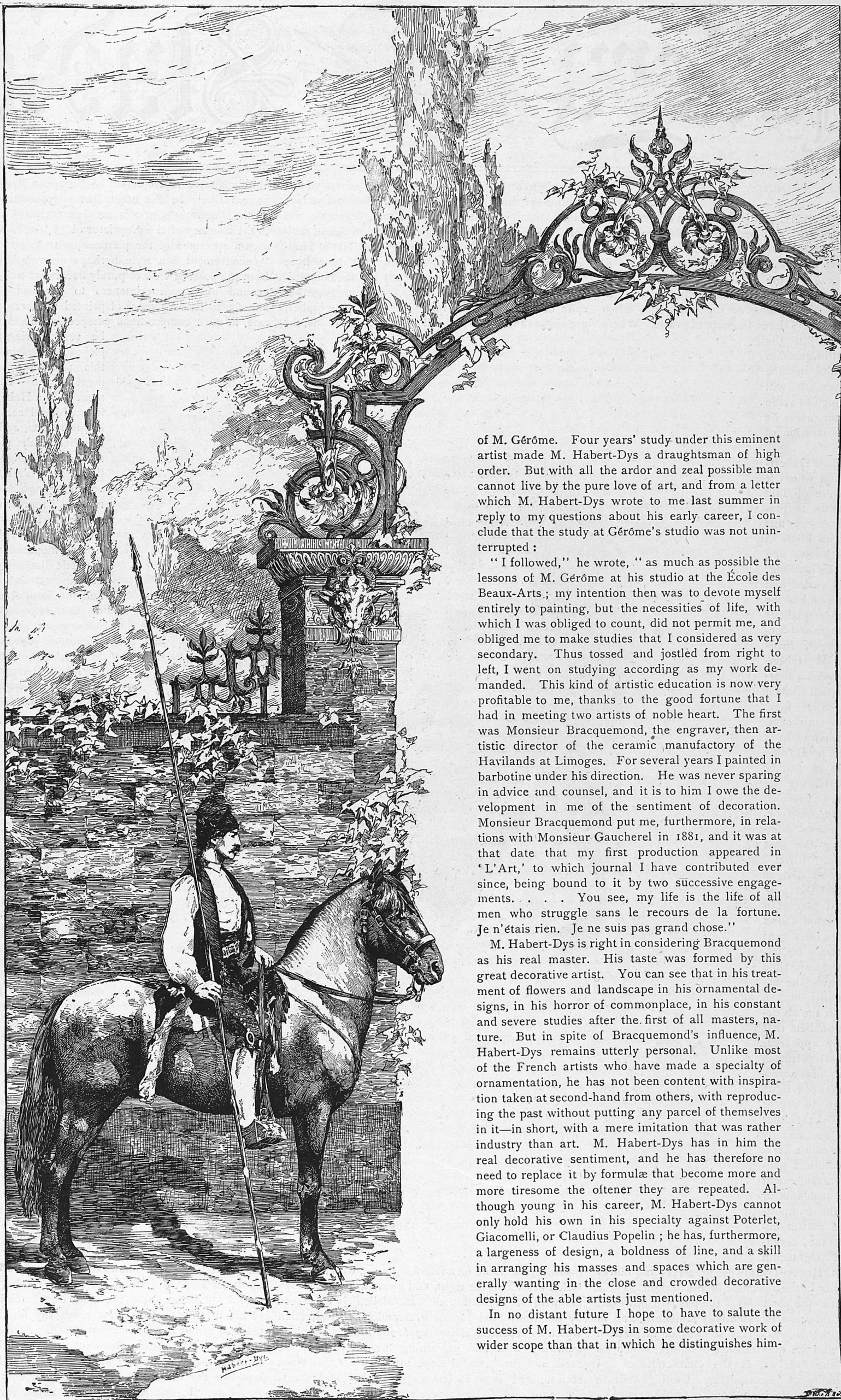
M. Habert-Dys was born at Fresnes, Department of Loir-et-Cher, September 23d, 1850. His parents were poor and died poor, being peasants and tillers of the soil. A certain weakness of constitution saved Habert-Dys from following his parents' hard means of bread-winning, and at the age of eighteen he was apprenticed to the ceramist, Ulysse Besnard, of Blois, who gave him his first notions of ornamentation. Naturally

M. Habert-Dys had manifested as a child certain aptitudes and dispositions for drawing, otherwise he would not have chosen the trade of a ceramist; but of his juvenile precocity one needs say nothing, the more so as our artist is modesty itself. At the age of twenty-three M. Habert-Dys went to Paris, without resources, without knowing anybody, ardent and penniless, like the majority of his fellow-students at the École des Beaux-Arts, where he entered the studio



JULES AUGUSTE HABERT-DYS.

instance, the frame on a following page, with its placid vision of cats on the right, and above a vision of flowers with an indication of water delicately expressed by the traditional Japanese meander—an indication which is repeated elsewhere around the frame, harmonizing with and explaining the swaying of the reeds and the graceful slope of the flower and plant stems. This is an excellent specimen of M. Habert-Dys's mixture of Japanese elegance of line and thor-




of M. Gérôme. Four years' study under this eminent artist made M. Habert-Dys a draughtsman of high order. But with all the ardor and zeal possible man cannot live by the pure love of art, and from a letter which M. Habert-Dys wrote to me last summer in reply to my questions about his early career, I conclude that the study at Gérôme's studio was not interrupted :

"I followed," he wrote, "as much as possible the lessons of M. Gérôme at his studio at the École des Beaux-Arts; my intention then was to devote myself entirely to painting, but the necessities of life, with which I was obliged to count, did not permit me, and obliged me to make studies that I considered as very secondary. Thus tossed and jostled from right to left, I went on studying according as my work demanded. This kind of artistic education is now very profitable to me, thanks to the good fortune that I had in meeting two artists of noble heart. The first was Monsieur Bracquemond, the engraver, then artistic director of the ceramic manufactory of the Havilands at Limoges. For several years I painted in barbotine under his direction. He was never sparing in advice and counsel, and it is to him I owe the development in me of the sentiment of decoration. Monsieur Bracquemond put me, furthermore, in relations with Monsieur Gaucherel in 1881, and it was at that date that my first production appeared in 'L'Art,' to which journal I have contributed ever since, being bound to it by two successive engagements. . . . You see, my life is the life of all men who struggle sans le recours de la fortune. Je n'étais rien. Je ne suis pas grand chose."

M. Habert-Dys is right in considering Bracquemond as his real master. His taste was formed by this great decorative artist. You can see that in his treatment of flowers and landscape in his ornamental designs, in his horror of commonplace, in his constant and severe studies after the first of all masters, nature. But in spite of Bracquemond's influence, M. Habert-Dys remains utterly personal. Unlike most of the French artists who have made a specialty of ornamentation, he has not been content with inspiration taken at second-hand from others, with reproducing the past without putting any parcel of themselves in it—in short, with a mere imitation that was rather industry than art. M. Habert-Dys has in him the real decorative sentiment, and he has therefore no need to replace it by formulæ that become more and more tiresome the oftener they are repeated. Although young in his career, M. Habert-Dys cannot only hold his own in his specialty against Poterlet, Giacomelli, or Claudius Popelin; he has, furthermore, a largeness of design, a boldness of line, and a skill in arranging his masses and spaces which are generally wanting in the close and crowded decorative designs of the able artists just mentioned.

In no distant future I hope to have to salute the success of M. Habert-Dys in some decorative work of wider scope than that in which he distinguishes him-



self so brilliantly at present. His talent and inventive genius are worthy of a larger field, and not merely the larger field of etching, which appears now to tempt him, but the larger and grander field of decorative painting applied to the adornment of interior architecture.

THEODORE CHILD.

A RECENT LONDON EXHIBITION.

THE French gallery in Pall Mall, which might better be called the European, representing as it does every school, English as well as Continental, makes this year a more brilliant display than ever before. The general character of this exhibition, to the eye fresh from the more strictly native ones, is of a refined pomp and splendor, a glory of color and dazzle of light-effects resulting in a certain impression of easy, elegant, and polished sophistication not unlike that one receives from Watteau shepherdesses or the dairy-maids of le Petit Trianon. Nature is seen costumed à la française and coquettishly conscious of every decorative advantage she can win from art. Continental art is too often self-conscious, but that self-consciousness is confined to its own brilliant external accomplishments, and is not the moral and sentimental self-consciousness which occasionally makes "patch-worky" and toneless English canvases seem so priggish.

A Munich picture, called "Home to the Fold," by E. Meissner, is a case in proof of this self-consciousness of Continental art. Nothing could be more simple and natural than the subject, a shepherd driving his flock homeward across a snowy plain, and pausing to say a prayer with bared head before a snow-freighted Calvary, and in the face of the setting sun. The sheep are faultlessly drawn and subtly fused in the deepening dusk, the shepherd, a nobly picturesque figure, monumentally outlined against dazzling snow and sky. Nevertheless, the whole scene is made operatically suggestive, and the art self-conscious by a stage-like illumination, like electric light, from the western sky falling upon the shepherd's face and figure; by the evident effort for "effect" of light-illuminated masses of warm shadow cast against a vividly cold background, the whole result not a poetic translation of picturesque and unconscious nature, but a showy, artistic fantaisie upon a natural theme. Shepherds are often enough warm masses of illumined shadow against cold, bright backgrounds in nature, but always then the effect is an unconscious one and not a deliberate and manifest chilling, heating, sharpening toward one focus—effect. When artistic effort becomes unduly prominent, when one realizes how much has been eliminated and how much subordinated to a central technical idea, when, in fact, a sense of the artist's dexterity and cleverness stands between the